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ABSTRACT

One of the necessities of basic literacy--basic knowledge--is divided into specific content area disciplines for instructional purposes; but the other need--competence in language skills--can and should be taught by teachers in all disciplines. High school content area teachers can promote the tenets of basic literacy by emphasizing the effective use of skills to process the growing scope of human knowledge, by teaching students how to read and study independently, and by teaching language skills that are relevant and pertinent to their particular academic disciplines. Specific techniques that teachers can use include having students share experiences, study together in small groups, rewrite materials in their own words, and do as much supplementary reading in the subject area as possible. Teachers can also use "job contracts" when making assignments, establish lesson procedures that prepare students for learning the materials, note appropriate study procedures, point out patterns of informational organization, explain the use of graphic aids, reinforce printed materials with the audiovisual materials, foster student vocabulary development and word recognition skills, structure assignments to ensure their successful completion, and use open-ended questions that apply the information and skills to lifelike situations. (RL)

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BASIC LITERACY THROUGH THE CONTENT AREAS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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The United States has always endorsed free public education. Throughout its history the people of the United States have striven to meet this idea. We are still in the process of striving, so that no individual is denied schooling for any reason whatsoever. Recently there have been and are movements in various states to insure basic literacy for all students. And since secondary schools are part of our public educational system, concern is voiced that students leaving the secondary school should have, at least, a basic literacy.

The focus, therefore, here is to determine what is meant by basic literacy and then to determine the educational processes which must be employed. Educational processes will compel us to investigate our philosophic beliefs, especially as we discuss basic literacy through instruction in the various content disciplines. Once we know what we believe, then we can investigate and explore specific procedures.

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LITERACY - A DEFINITION

Basic literacy is that level of competence which an individual needs in both knowledge and language usage to sustain himself in our current society. The levels of competence can and do change as the requirements and expectations of society change. For instance, even less than a century ago, a mere moment in the history of mankind, a person used a shovel if he wished to dig a ditch. Today, we have heavy and complex machinery. Less than fifty years ago mathematical manipulation was done by individual humans. Now we have computers which can compute the mathematical manipulation even faster than humans. Comparisons of technological developments over the span of a century or less are infinite. It seems to be a truism that as technology develops, the level of basic literacy rises.

The levels of basic literacy are fluid. They change in accordance with the demands of specific time. Even today there does not seem to be complete agreement on the level required for an individual to be independent in sustaining himself. Some set the level at that of a fourth grade pupil. Others have said it should be seventh or ninth grade.

Whatever the level of literacy, it involves two competences of the individual. One is a basic knowledge - a fundamental amount of information. The other is a basic competence in the skills of using language. The individual must be able to listen with intelligence, speak with clarity, write with coherence and read with understanding.

One aspect of basic literacy, language competence, focuses on the skills an individual needs for functioning in society. We are concerned with the process of learning and its relation to the use of language. It is this area which will enable the individual to become as independent as possible and to

sustain it. The individual must be able to cope with an increasingly intricate technology as well as many laws and regulations which govern or affect his existence.

Competence in language usage can be fostered through the various content disciplines. Knowledge is the traditional outcome of content teaching and this is needed. However, greater skill in listening, speaking, reading and writing can and should be developed as well in the content disciplines.

TEACHING PROCEDURE: PHILOSOPHY

Essential to the philosophy of basic literacy instruction in the content areas is the teachers commitment to the precept. There are five points noted here which would have to be considered by each teacher.

1. Basic literacy requires the student to know and use process effectively as well as to know the subject matter. The scope of human knowledge is growing so rapidly that the individual must develop enough competency in process (skills) to sustain himself independently.

2. Basic literacy as it applies to each content discipline is one of the fundamental goals of the discipline. The purpose of learning subject-matter is not only for the individual to have a higher quality life, as important and desirable as this is, but for the individual to have the information and skills to function.

3. Basic literacy is best taught in each content discipline as it applies. The point here is relevancy and pertinence. The skill is best taught when not isolated from its subject content. They then have more meaning for the student and he/she can note more efficiently their application.

4. The content teacher has a responsibility to teach students how to read and study independently in his discipline. Indeed. The student must achieve the competency to be as independent as possible.

5. Learning is more effective if the learner knows the reason for what he is learning. It is a well known postulate that we learn more effectively if we have a rationale for so doing. It may well be a responsibility of teachers to explain why specific procedures are used in teaching and the application of what is being learned.

TEACHING PROCEDURES: SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

1. Have students share experiences. Many times students can explain information to each other in a way that has clarity for both. Also, they learn from each other in that one student may have information that another doesn't and vice-versa.

2. Have students study together in pairs or in small groups. Again, they can learn from each other. Also, they can support one another. Contrary to some fears about allowing this kind of freedom in the classroom, the great majority of students conduct themselves in a very mature manner, especially when they know what to do and what is to be accomplished.

3. Have students rewrite material in their own words. Through discussion of the information have the students restate it in their own vernacular. This helps them to internalize the information, to note the organization of the information and to become more knowledgeable about the new vocabulary. Such an activity as this is usually best done as a class group rather than individually. With a class there is interaction through discussion.

4. Have the students do as much supplementary reading as possible. Supplementary reading should be fostered. The background of information is increased thereby as well as giving the student the opportunity to discover information independently. Each classroom should have a collection of supplementary materials to which students have easy access.

5. Use "job contracts" as a method of making assignments. This type of assignment can be attuned to the individual student's needs. It also provides for realistic goal setting when planned with the student thereby guiding the student toward self-responsibility - a basic competency for an individual's functioning in society.

6. Use standard lesson procedure which would provide for an adequate preparation with the students. Develop the background necessary, clarify the fundamental concepts, preview the material and be sure purpose is established. Give adequate explanation of the necessary understanding and makes provision for reinforcement and review. Particularly as the knowledge and skills are reinforced, help the student to make application.

7. Teach students appropriate procedures of study. This would include the application of Robinson's well known study formula, SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review). Guide the students in the use of this. Also, work with them on techniques of note taking. Techniques for following directions are also essential, especially in the filling out of applications of various sorts and the reading of diagrams with accompanying directions.

8. Help students to recognize patterns of informational organization. This would involve helping the student to see the relationship of main ideas to details, causes and their effects, comparisons and contrasts, and sequence or the steps of a process. Comprehension and hence retention is abetted if the student can determine organizational patterns in information.

9. Give instruction in all of the graphic aids. These aides - maps, diagrams, cartoons, tables, charts, graphs, pictures - supplement ritten information.

10. Use all of the A-V media you have at your disposal. These can reinforce information, enrich it, and supplement the printed language.

11. Give help as necessary in word recognition techniques. High school students often need to develop techniques of syllabication, especially when they meet multi-syllabic words. A knowledge of word structure can be helpful. Basic roots, prefixes, suffixes, and inflectional endings are knowledge which can abet their independence in reading and study.

12. Foster vocabulary development continually. Establish the concept which a word represents. As often as you can do this through the student's own experience. Obviously, also, much instruction and work should be on the ways of using the context(s) in which the word is used. Learning 3-5 new words a day seems to be more effective than learning a list of 15 each week.

13. Give the students as much structure as you note they need when making an assignment to insure its successful completion. Be very sure that they have the purpose of it clearly delineated.

14. Use open-ended questions as well as factual ones. Open-ended questions help the student to apply the information and skills to conrete life situations, often his own. Thereby, they increase his/her understanding of the relevancy of the information.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The principal philosophy which has been espoused here is that the goal of basic literacy is to lead the student toward independence in sustaining himself/herself in a democratic society. To implement this philosophy various techniques of teaching procedure have been suggested for fostering the necessary skills. Fundamental knowledge and competence in skills are both requirements of basic

literacy. The content areas provide the stages for the acquisition of skills in that they are then taught in the context where they apply. It is not a question of whether we should. We must. The high calibur of our democratic living demands competent individuals.